

Asset #7: Youth perceive that adults in the community value children and youth.

COMMUNITY VALUES YOUTH

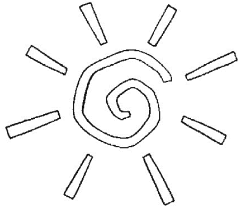
Research shows that youth who feel valued in their community enjoy better mental health; a greater sense of personal control and optimism; reduced delinquency, violence, and fighting; less substance abuse; and higher academic performance.

All adults in the community have a role to play in showing their support for youth. If young people perceive that they are valued only by the adults that they know, they are not fully connected to their community and miss the benefits that such a connection can provide. But, it can be difficult for even the best-intentioned adults to explicitly communicate that they value youth: frequently, adults feel that youth already know that they're valued and appreciated.

The following discussions topics can help you work with young people to identify the ways that the community does, and does not; provide them with the empowerment associated with this asset:

- Do you ever encounter adults who have negative perceptions about people your age? Do you know how to respond politely but effectively to their criticism or comments?
- Are there good places for kids your age to hang out after school and on the weekends? If there aren't, what kind of place would you like to see?
- Do you feel that adults at school and other organizations give you an opportunity to voice your opinion? Can you suggest some ways that adults could provide opportunities for youth to provide feedback and suggestions about programs?

Community Values Youth is intrinsically linked with other external assets—the more that adults provide children with support, empowerment, boundaries, and positive expectations, the more children and youth will feel that they are welcomed and valued by the community at large. In other words, the more effective that we are as a community at building assets in general, the more effective we will be at raising the levels of this woefully lacking asset.



ACTIVITIES

The activities below are a starting point to help adults find ways to show youth that they are valued and appreciated.

FOR FAMILIES

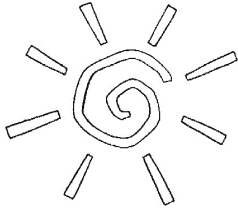
- One way to help young people understand that they are valued is as simple as pointing out that many of the programs, activities, and facilities they enjoy—e.g., libraries, parks, and playgrounds—are created and maintained by the community.
- Your children can participate in civic life regarding issues that concern them. Help them identify issues that affect young people and write letters to newspapers or government officials about ways to address their concerns.
- Encourage your children to write letters of appreciation to the organizations and businesses that treat young people well. Doing so will encourage them to continue their efforts, and your child's letter may be publicly displayed.

FOR ALL ADULTS

- Remember to treat all young people—regardless of their age or appearance—with respect, and take their ideas and suggestions seriously.
- If you work in a business where youth may be customers or clients, train your staff to treat young people respectfully make sure that your policies are youth-friendly. If your business serves adults who may have children with them, make sure the space is inviting and provides age-appropriate diversions.
- Publicly celebrate youth contributions to your organization, and recognize individual contributions daily.
- Attend and contribute to local government meetings to make sure that the needs of young people are being addressed.

AT SCHOOL OR IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Ask businesses in the community to show support for your program. In addition to financial donations and sponsorships, they can display artwork, host tours of their facility, or find other ways to demonstrate that they care about the youth in the community. (Doing so makes good business sense—today's youth are Tomorrow's customers!)



- With older children and teens, discuss whether the community has good places for kids and teens to hang out, and whether there are more positive opportunities for younger kids than for older ones. Use the results to create an action plan to make adults in the community more aware of the issue.
- Invite distinguished members of the community to attend performances and events.

**This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone.
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